

## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns  
Issue #159, October 15, 2011

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Mum time already?! Above: Mums and pumpkins go well together, and should also be planted together, *in spring*. Below: Cultivate friends who'll share a mum of proven hardiness. This chunky division of mum 'Clara Curtis' has a larger root zone than that huge potted mum you just brought home. Guess which one has a better chance of wintering over? See page 2.



### Feeling dumb about hardy mums

I'm so frustrated. I went out **shopping for hardy mums** but came back without even one plant, despite going to four different places.

I want *hardy* ones, that will come back next year. At one place I was told there is no such thing as a hardy mum. At another they said there are hardy mums but these they're selling now are annuals and won't bloom for us in a garden. Another person told me I should ask for "garden mums."



I know the plants I want are out there, so **why can't I find them** and why do people look at me like I'm nuts if I ask about them? - P.M. -

With mums, **every one of those answers can be true**. Most are hardy enough to grow in a garden but depending on the flower type, how a particular plant was produced and when you planted it, it may not establish in your garden or may not bloom reliably.

Fortunately, there's **a short, happy answer**: Most fall-blooming mums are hardy at least to zone 5. In fall, before your area's hard freeze date, **buy whichever one you like** from any place you choose, plant it in your garden, enjoy it in bloom, cut it back hard after bloom and mulch it well over its first winter. Chances are it will survive.

If that fall-planted mum fails to survive winter, don't give up! Buy that same variety or a similar variety, choosing from the "garden mum" section of a catalog. Order and **plant it in spring**. You will almost certainly see a wholly different result with a mum given a chance to establish in



These two mums have different flower forms but are both in the category "garden mum" since they have sturdy, relatively small, weatherproof flowers and proven hardiness.



spring. That's when mums do most of their serious root-growing. One that's been in place all summer has a bigger root zone and thus a better chance to make it through winter without dying of dehydration than a pot-bound, late planted specimen.

Of course, there's **an even shorter answer: Beg a piece from a friend** who has established mums.

Now, **about those other things** mum sellers told you.

**"There is no such thing as a hardy mum."** This is correct if it included the unspoken clause

"...as a category in our supplier's catalog." All the mum species are hardy to zone 6, 5 or 4 that have been used to hybridize fall blooming varieties, so chances are probably better than 50-50 that any given plant has the genes for hardiness. However, mums are grown primarily as a "pot crop" in the U.S. Pot crops are meant as throw-away plants. Thus many mum growers don't test for hardiness, don't mention hardiness in their catalogs, and retailers don't select for that.



**"These are annuals."** See the previous point, a reference to mums viewed as single-use plants, just like poinsettias (left).

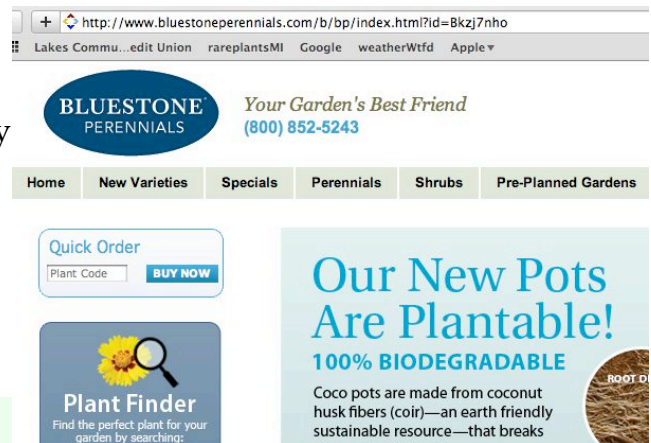
**"These won't bloom for you."** Some mums have genes for blooming early, some for blooming late. A mum can winter over in a given garden but fail to bloom in subsequent years because it's a variety selected for blooming so late in the year that the local growing season's too short -- hard freezes kill it back before it flowers. We had one of those, a big white football mum that bloomed its first year and

then didn't show us any more flowers until three years later. That year, we'd thrown old bed sheets over parts of the garden to keep plants going for a relative's October wedding. That brought the mum through the first freeze. Afterward, fall turned very mild and hard frost didn't return until Thanksgiving. That plant was so spectacular in bloom in mid-November that we remember it well, 30 years later.

Growers bring late variety mums into bloom in time for local fall sales by blacking out their greenhouses in midsummer. That gives the mums the long nights that initiate flower buds, earlier than would happen in area gardens. So the mums form flowers sooner than they would otherwise.

If you plant one of these mums and from its second year you see frost kills it before bloom, go back to the catalogs. Start over with an earlier blooming type.

**"Ask for garden mums."** Mums have been in cultivation for thousands of years. Hybridizing and selection have produced many thousands of varieties. Specialists have kept track of them by dividing them into 30-some categories based on bloom time, form, size and color. Probably you've heard some of the category names: Spider, quill, anemone-centered, etc. "Garden" one of the categories. Most garden mums are early types, with small flowers (up to about two inches across) and petals of heavy substance that withstand weather well, or reflexed flowers -- petals curving down, to shed rain quickly and avoid fungal problems.



## Mum's the word from these suppliers

We found hardy "garden mums" offered by these growers:

Bluestone Perennials, Ohio, <http://www.bluestoneperennials.com>

Faribault Growers, Minnesota, <http://www.fgimn.com/retail.php>

King's Mums, Oregon, <https://www.kingsmums.com/>

Busse Gardens, Minnesota, <http://www.bussegardens.com/onlinecat.cfm>

Mums by Paschke, you must send for a catalog:

12270 E. Main Road, North East, Pennsylvania, 16428 814-725-9860



Looking for a source for a particular mum variety? We recommend as for other plants that you go to University of Minnesota's Landscape Arboretum plant finder and type in that plant name: <http://plantinfo.umn.edu>

Regarding hardiness: You may not find zones listed in some of these catalogs, for reasons explained on page 2 under "...no such thing as a hardy mum."

We have some hardy mum varieties, ourselves but we think we are not alone in having lost track of their original names. We do know one is 'Clara Curtis' -- an old stand-by that's a late blooming, soft pink, semi-double daisy form. We refer to the others by names such as "Mrs. Koski's pink" and "Marjorie's yellow daisy," which look a lot like Bluestone's 'Debutante' and 'Amber Morning,' but that's a guess. Once our readers let us know of others, we'll report those.

Also: See Issue #143 for more on Minnesota-bred hardy mums such as 'Minnqueen'.  
[www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg7068.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg7068.html)

No, we haven't started to take ads. But when we come across a personal connection we try to say "green thumbs up" to our friends in the gardening business. Both Busse Gardens and Bluestone Perennials simply came up when we went looking for hardy mum sources, and we smiled to see both:



The Boonstra family began and has run Bluestone Perennials for almost 40 years. For a time their daughter, Jan, lived near us and impressed us with her dedication to the green world. Jan's back in Ohio working in the family business now, so if you need a mum they carry we're pleased to refer you to her.

Busse Gardens was started by Ainie Busse ("I'm eeny-meeny-miny Ainie!" she told us, at one memorable perennial plant workshop we both attended). She's now retired but still occasionally advising the new owners, Gary Goldsmith and his partner Alex Stolitza.

While we're on this topic of personal connections: Not only is it a nice thing to do in hard times -- to help support family businesses with your orders -- but it's to all gardeners' advantage to keep as many good growers afloat as possible. Only if there are a lot of specialty growers will we continue to have access to the incredible diversity of species that exists today. It wasn't like this when we started buying plants in the 1970's. Then, the number of perennial species for sale was not hundreds as it is today, but dozens, and many of those had to be started from seed. It could drop that low again!

#### University of Minnesota Mums

*Proven Hardiness even in Zone 4 gardens*



Select from 14 different Mum cultivars all developed by the U of M's famous breeding program. If you are tired of having your Mums die every winter, try some of these. Developed for cold hardiness and prolific gorgeous blooms.



### Mmmm-mums

Mum flower petals are edible. They're tasty -- and pretty -- in cream soups, green salads and chicken salads. Rinse petals before serving, or blanch them for several seconds before serving. Do not leave them in hot water for more than a few seconds, or they may become bitter.

## Mum identity crisis?

Are mums *Chrysanthemum x morifolium* or *Dendranthema x grandiflora*?

It should be a *Chrysanthemum*, as it was called from the 1700's until 1961. However, between 1961 and 1999 a big chunk of the world learned to use and a great many current books were printed with *Dendranthema*.

The mess is unresolved despite a 1999 ruling/reversal by the International Botanical Congress that reinstated *Chrysanthemum*. It was too little too late to sort out 38 years of confusion.

You can read about it at:

[www.indyzoo.com/SiteAssets/pdfs/HandoutA-chrysanthemum\\_name.pdf](http://www.indyzoo.com/SiteAssets/pdfs/HandoutA-chrysanthemum_name.pdf)

or, more technically, at

[www.jstor.org/pss/1223427](http://www.jstor.org/pss/1223427)

For the foreseeable future you should search under *Dendranthema x grandiflora* and if you don't find what you need, search under *Chrysanthemum x morifolium*.

## Mums as "pot crops" and "cuts"

**Pot crop:** A plant that can be coaxed into full bloom while in a pot, often out of season, meant to be sold as a decoration. Poinsettias, Easter lilies, Mother's day azaleas and cyclamen are other pot crops. Are they big business? You bet. One of the largest suppliers of rooted mum cuttings for growing-on is recorded as selling over 50 million per year.

50 million. Phew. Yet, that's playing second fiddle to the plant that bumped mums from the number one position in 1995 and then galloped far ahead -- poinsettias. Perhaps we should be glad those hundreds of millions of plants return quickly to the compost, or we'd each have about an acre of them.

Growers of pot crops select varieties to grow based on flower color, form, vigorous growth, even transportability -- whether the stems are strong enough to hold up to being trucked in full bloom from grower to a retail location. Any given pot crop variety's performance in the garden is probably not even known but if it is, it is not considered.

**Cuts:** Plants grown to provide cut flowers. Staggering numbers of mums are sold as cuts, yet mums are not the top-selling cut flower in the U.S. Care to guess which nine flowers join with mums as the biggest money makers for the U.S. florist industry, and how each flower ranks? See *Mums top the charts* on page 13 for that top ten list.

These are "cuts" -- cut flowers ready for arranging. Because they came from our friend Cheryl Bennerup's perennial garden, they aren't the typical mix of ... mums and what nine other flowers? Answer on page 13.





## Pinch that mum or see it on stilts

**Pot crop mums are "pinched"** to make them shorter and bushier. Some growers do a classic pinch -- cutting the plants back every few weeks until six or more weeks before they want them to bloom.

However, most producers have **traded their shears for chemicals called growth retardants** -- copies of plant hormones that keep stems short and delay bloom. The mum you buy at 15 inches tall in bloom this year may be much taller next year and may bloom earlier, unless you pinch it.

Yet **tall mums** are not all bad. We had several seed-grown mums for a while, that we didn't pinch -- perhaps you know how hard it is to clip your own precious seedlings back. Since those plants provided **fabulous long-stemmed cut flowers**, we continued to grow them au naturel.

## Pool of undesirable reflection

I have an **above ground pool** in the back yard and I **don't like looking at it** in the spring time. What can I do about that, in terms of landscaping? - W.L. -

**First, distract attention from it.** Put a winter interest cluster of plants off to one side of the scene, to give you something to look at and train your eye to look along a different line, away from the pool all through winter. That habit will continue in spring

Second, block it out of the springtime scene. This means thinking about *where you are* in the spring when you see that pool and find it ugly. Plant or place something between you and it so you don't see it.

As long as whatever it is that's going to block the view is between the springtime viewer and it - the ugly feature -- the block works. A carefully placed island bed or individual shrub can make all the difference. Keep in mind that the closer that block is to you, the better, because small but nearby items can block out just as much of the view as larger but distant items.

Passing thought: Is the pool's tarp a bright color? Can you get a new one in a neutral color?

Something to avoid: Stuffing plants right up against the side of the pool in an attempt to hide it. Do that, and you just draw attention to it by "drawing a line around it."

Whoa! Our photo library's failed us, or at any rate our recall of appropriate images in it met a dead end. Perhaps you have a photo of a landscape design involving a pool you'd like to contribute? Send it in! Meanwhile, suffice to say that a swimming pool in the landscape is like the proverbial 300 pound gorilla: You can't make it move. So just work around it.



## Beat the beetles to hibiscus seed

I have two **hardy hibiscus** plants, 3 or 4 years old. They are growing great and I leave them in the ground all winter because they are large bushes now. When they bloom the flowers are as big as a ten inch paper plate.

They have **seed pods** with large seeds inside. Can I use these to **start new**

**plants?** – M.A. –



Well, duh: One of its common names is crimsoneyed rosemallow.

**Yup! Nick each seed before planting it**, since *Hibiscus moscheutos* (the hardy hibiscus, crimsoneyed rosemallow or swamp mallow) is a sensible wetland native that produces a seed with a water resistant coating. The coating allows the seed to stay alive and afloat while it drifts to a likely place to sprout. Left to its own devices, it can wait years to sprout, perhaps to take advantage of a drought year that exposes the mudflat it settled in.

Your nick puts a break in the seed's armor, letting water through to speed up germination.



Alternatively, soak the seeds in warm water until they sink -- this will take at least a few days. Then plant them **barely covered with potting mix and keep them warm**, 70 to 75 degrees. They can sprout in 2 to 4 weeks.

If you soak and sow them right now the seedlings will need a warm place under grow lights all winter. Even as seedlings they're big plants so giving them enough room and light indoors is difficult. Best to **store the seed in the refrigerator for planting next spring**.

Like all seeds, these are best **taken out of the pod and cleaned well** to remove all chaff and other foreign matter before you store them. If you store the pod whole you may lose out, since there are at least **three seed-eating insects** that may be lurking there. Hibiscus seed beetle (*Althaeus hibisci*) and snout beetle (*Conotrachelus fissunguis* #) lay eggs in the pod, which hatch about the time the pod (left) dries and begins to open. In addition, there's the moth caterpillar *Chionodes hibiscella* which ties rosemallow leaves together and feasts on them during the summer but leaves its last brood of eggs in the seed pods. Those caterpillars eat the seeds and wait out the winter in the pod. These

insects can eat nearly all of a hibiscus' seed crop.



If you're in our neck of the woods, up at the northern edge of this *Hibiscus*' native range (from zone 8 to zone 5, from the Gulf of Mexico to Ontario and Wisconsin), you may not have very many seeds to spare. Although the plants can be self fertile they are much more likely to set seed when their bumblebee pollinators deposit pollen from one flower on the stigma of another. The more hibiscus plants in the area, the better, since that means more flowers are open and ripe at the same time.

#See <http://bugguide.net/node/view/320813> With apologies, Mr. Durante, few insects we've seen have borne you greater resemblance.

### That's unexpected:

**Hardy hibiscus**, a water's edge American native, may be somewhat **dependent on fire** for its survival in natural habitats. It's promoted by wildfires, storms and beaver activity that provide the open conditions it needs. Without fire or shore-clearing storms, it's crowded out by reeds, shrubs and trees.



### Seed eating we like to see

Hardy **hibiscus seeds** are eaten by **birds**: northern bobwhites, blue-winged teals, pintails and wood ducks. Small birds visit the seed pods to pluck out beetle and caterpillar larvae.

Ducks and hardy hibiscus both favor the edge of a sunny pond. Sometimes they even "do lunch" together at the plant's expense.

### Sweet eats from decorative potato vine?

I grew **sweet potato vine** this summer -- some with black leaves, some with gold leaves, some variegated. They all did quite well, trailing out of their pots and nearly covering the driveway. I also have **huge potatoes bulging up** out of the soil. I didn't expect this. Are these **edible**? Can they be stored over winter? Are they treated like potatoes for storing and replanting?  
- D.W. -



Those decorative sweet potato vines (*Ipomoea batatas* 'Blackie', 'Aurea', 'Variegata', etc.) are the **same species as the sweet potato grown for food. They can be eaten.**



However, the plants you describe were selected because the species' normal purple pigmentation was especially abundant ('Blackie') or the leaves were gold ('Aurea', at right), or splashed with white and pink ('Variegata'). Unlike the most widely grown farm variety, the orange-fleshed 'Jewel', yours **were not selected for tasty tubers**. So don't be surprised if they're as far in flavor from a store-bought sweet potato as a root of Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*) is from its cultivated offspring, sweet carrots (*D. carota* 'Sweetness II', 'Chantenay', etc.)

**You can save the tubers** over winter for eating or for growing again next year as an ornamental. The trick is to keep them cool enough that they don't sprout and at a humidity that prevents both desiccation and rotting. A root cellar is perfect -- 55°F and about 50% humidity. In a plastic produce bag in a refrigerator crisper drawer may work, too (45°F).

Sweet potato is **a zone 9 perennial** -- it grows year-round in central Florida and warmer climes where there is no true winter. So you also have the option of bringing it indoors and keeping it alive through **winter as a houseplant**. Clip it back before you bring it in, so it's a manageable size and will leave outside most of its leaf-eating, foliage-lurking pests.



Sweet potato vine (above, and at left) is a perennial where it's at home in the zone 9 subtropics. It's a big plant, and it doesn't make all the foliage for nothing -- it's looking to store it away in a tuber. You can eat that tuber. Prepare it just like any other sweet potato... but you may find it less tasty.

### Big mistake, big lesson: Pretty *Lantana* as a Trojan horse

Since **mistakes are learning experiences**, our biggest blunders could be viewed as great

treasures. If only we didn't have to pay the price!

Can we avoid the cost and advance as a group by pooling our bloopers? Let's try. Here's a **worst mistake submitted by one-who-will-remain-anonymous**:

A *Lantana* we grew on the patio in a large pot was such a delight all summer that we brought it **in for the winter**. We've seen it growing in wet ditches in Florida so we know it can keep going for years if it doesn't freeze. But we simply moved it inside, and that was the mistake.

By Christmas there was a perpetual cloud of **whitefly** in the room with it and we had to throw the plant out. But we also had to quash the start of whitefly problems on other plants because some of the adults must have gone afield to lay their eggs.

We never noticed whitefly on this lantana outdoors.



Above: *Lantana* can entertain us outdoors all summer, with flowers and the butterflies that flock to them. If you invite it into the house for the winter, give it a bath and its own grow light so it won't continue to "entertain" you with insects of another type.

You might also do what a horticulturist at a conservatory advised: **Cut a Lantana back** when you bring it in, and **clip off all its leaves**. In good light, it will leaf out again, but without so many whitefly eggs in residence.

It's tough when that happens. The plant had **so much energy outdoors** that it was able to put forth defenses that **kept its insect pest population well under control**. Most of the insect larvae died when they ingested plant-made poisons, starved or were skewered when they tried to graze among the leaf's sharp bristles, or were killed by beneficial insects the plant's defensive scents called in. Once **indoors in lower light, the plant couldn't fight so effectively**.

So in northern regions, provide a subtropical species such as *Lantana* its own **grow light** for winter, and leave it on at least 12 hours a day. Then it can continue fighting with the same gusto.

### No need to douse those plants...

...with pesticides! We mean the plants you had outdoors and are now bringing in for winter##. Use a forceful spray from the garden hose to **rinse the foliage several times** during the plants' last weeks outdoors. Coat those leaves first with **an oil-soap solution** if they belong to a species such as bay tree, that's prone to insect trouble. That's all we do, and then we give the plants good light and comfortable temperatures once they're indoors. In 35 years of doing only that before we haul our charges back indoors, we've had no indoor outbreaks.

##See What's Coming Up #3 for more on cleaning up summered-out plants.

Need a back issue? Ask a friend, email us, or order our CDs (page 21).



## Scrabbling in the garden, word play

We gardeners earn admiring murmurs when we display our garden's produce in vases and on plates. Why don't we stir up a bit of that admiration by tossing a nifty horticultural term or two on the table during the next Scrabble game? For instance:

**tier:** noun; TY ur; an insect that creates a shelter in which to feed, using threadlike or sticky substances to tie leaves together;  
*When we see apple leaves that seem to be glued together, and pull them apart to find scraped, brown patches there, we know a leaf **tier** was there earlier in the year.*



Above and left: Two different leaf tier insects rolled and tied these leaves. To each its own method of rolling and tying, but both shared an objective: to make a shelter in which to feed unseen.

**caudex;** noun; CAW deks; the thickened, usually underground base of the stem of some herbaceous perennials, from which new leaves and stems arise;  
*Cut the perennial all the way down in fall; you won't hurt it, as all its new growth will come from the **caudex**.*

**dehisce:** verb; duh HISS; to burst open;  
*When the pod ripens it will **dehisce**, splitting open along the seams.*

**phyllaries;** noun; FIL uh reez; the tiny leaves close beneath the head of the flower in many members of the mum family;  
*Every part of the mountain bluet flower is intricate and beautiful, including the **phyllaries**.*



Right: The scale-like, overlapping, dark-edged segments under the wispy head of a mountain bluet (*Centaurea montana*) are phyllaries.

**imbibition:** noun; IM buh BISH un; the taking up of liquid by a solid, resulting in swelling;  
*The seed's soaked a while and now it's swelling, so **imbibition** must be underway.*  
(Or: Imbibition is a great word to ask someone to repeat if you suspect they've been imbibing!)

**oligohaline:** adjective; UH lih goh HAY liyn; slightly brackish, slightly salty;  
*The **oligohaline** marsh communities between the saltwater of the Chesapeake Bay and fresh water of the inland areas are saline, yet freshwater plants and animals can live there because the salt concentration is very low.*  
(Hmm. If hardy hibiscus can grow in oligohaline marshes, perhaps it's a good choice for rain gardens that occasionally receive runoff from roads treated with de-icing salt.)

**selfed:** verb; SELFd; fertilized a blossom to cause seed to ripen, using pollen from that same flower or another flower on the same plant;  
*We tried to remove all the anthers from that flower so we could pollinate it with pollen from our chosen mate, but we missed one and it seems to have **selfed** already.*

### Tip cuttings: Growing on from what people are saying this week

So much goes on in email exchanges between newsletters! We wish we could include it all.  
Excerpts:

#### A shade too dark

I have a garden in deep shade and **nothing blooms**. Even the shade plants don't bloom. Is there something wrong with the soil, something I should be adding? - L.G. -

Our guess is that it's not a soil problem, it's **a light problem**. Sunlight is energy for plants. Without sufficient energy even a shade plant can't bloom. Choose plants for -- and rely more on -- **foliage color** for effect in shade, rather than flowers. You also need to either **prune the trees** regularly to allow more light into that area, or move the plants further out from the trees into areas with more light.

Right: Foliage color and texture play bigger roles in a shade garden, than flower color.



#### Countdown running on bulb planting

How long can I keep **planting bulbs**? - C. -

**Until the ground freezes.** Optimal time is from the first of September until the end of October so the bulbs have time to develop plenty of roots this fall before the ground freezes. However, even if they're put into the ground right before a freeze there will be some time to grow roots during winter thaws and before the soil warms to 50 degrees in spring.



## No fun, just fungus in a spotty lawn

How do I **get rid of fungus in my lawn**? It's ring spot, maybe -- dead circles. - H.R. -

That fungus is **an opportunist, not a really aggressive disease**. It's like flu, which infects and kills the weak and the old. The best long term solution for it, as for most lawn diseases, is to **make the lawn healthier** and get some disease resistant grass started, too.

The number one problem with lawns is compacted soil and weak roots. So **aerate, water more, and use an solid organic fertilizer** such as Ringer Lawn Restore that has not only nutrients but organic matter to build up the soil. Rake the thin areas and **spread high quality grass seed**, one that includes specific named varieties of grass on its ingredients label. You want a label that lists "'BlueNew' bluegrass" (not a real variety name) rather than listing a generic name, Kentucky bluegrass. It's not what the variety name is that matters most, but that it is there. Newer, named seed varieties\* are those that have been selected for disease resistance.



When a fungus attacks a lawn, first killing circular patches and then larger areas, don't focus on killing the fungus so much as making the lawn healthier. The fungus is pretty much ubiquitous, and lawn growing on well aerated, moist, fertile soil just shrugs off its advances.



\*For more, copy this URL to your browser <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/efans/ygnews/2010/04/lawn-grass-varieties-seed-labe.html>

## Mums on the top ten lists\*

### Mums 8th in U.S. cut flower production

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1) roses \$67.6 million      | 6) Gerber daisies, \$20 million           |
| 2) lilies \$57.4 million     | 7) snapdragons, \$17.2 million            |
| 3) tulips, \$26.2 million    | 8) mums, \$16.5 million                   |
| 4) gladiolas, \$24.2 million | 9) delphiniums & larkspur, \$10.8 million |
| 5) Iris, \$20.1 million      | 10) <i>Lisianthus</i> \$10.1 million      |



## Mums 3rd in cut flower imports to the U.S.

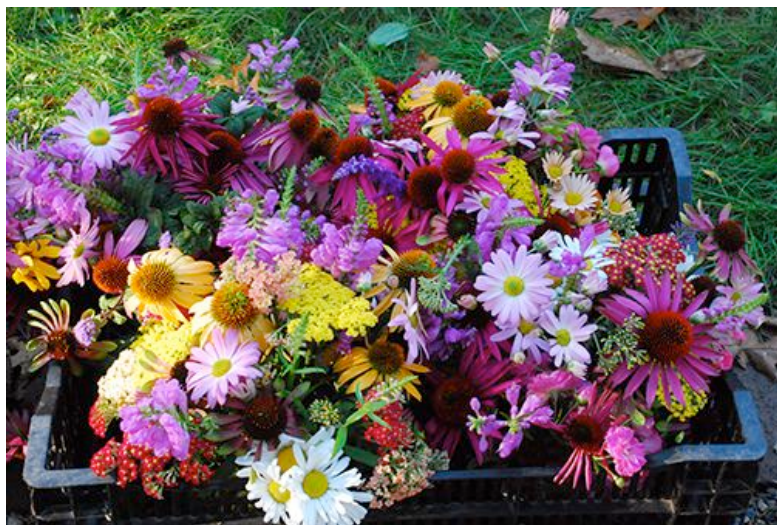
- 1) roses \$205.7 million
- 2) carnations \$71.3 million
- 3) pompon mum, \$50.6 million
- 4) *Alstroemeria*, \$23.6 million
- 5) baby's breath, \$21.8 million
- 6) other flowers and preserved flowers, \$192.2 million

\*As reported in the latest edition (2001) U.S. International Trade Commission Cut Flower Industry summary.

### 'Way up there:

Mums are among the longest lasting cut flowers commercially produced. They may be stored dry (no water) in airtight containers at 31°F for several weeks before selling.\*\* When removed from these containers they must be re-cut and then handled in the same way as freshly cut stems.

\*\*From the University of Clemson Hort L65 bulletin, *Understanding and Producing Chrysanthemums*



Considering the U.S. dollars that flow out to Europe and South America for imported cut flowers: If we cut them from our own gardens, do we help the balance of trade?

## This week in our garden

### Grow with us! This week:

**Make up lost time.** We were gone for most of a week to the International Master Gardener conference -- what an honor to send time with so many people devoting so many hours to helping their communities remain in touch with the natural world! Yet it's time to get gardens squared away for winter so we have to hustle.

So, **priority one: Get on-hold and still-not-planted new plants and bulbs into the ground.** Even if they can't get into their permanent places, they should get snuggled into the soil where they can stretch their roots and plug into the moisture there.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Priority two: Edge and weed**, and divide plants. Weeds begin at the edge of a garden, so even if we can't cover every square foot of the gardens where we're playing catch-up, we'll make sure the edge is clear of weeds and mulched well. We'll also remove all roots from that area if they are trying to run in or



Most cutting we do in fall is to facilitate weeding. It's only a small hosta, but... (turn the page!)

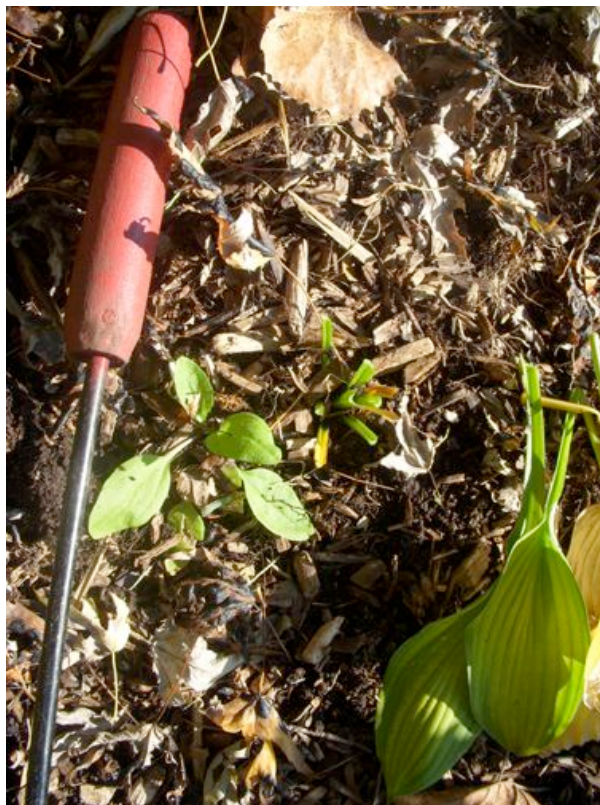


out of the bed with the aim of colonizing new ground.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Priority three: Take cuttings of tender plants** or bring the plants indoors as winter residents, **and lift tender bulbs** we have decided are worth keeping because who knows if we'll find just the same one again next year? We have some dahlias, tuberous begonias, cannas and potentially a few gladiolas on our list. Some we'll let sit in a dry place until the soil dries off the tubers, then store them for winter in boxes of sand or peat in a cool place -- 50 to 55 degrees. Others we'll bury in a pit where Ma Nature can keep them insulated from drying air and ice crystals under a couple feet of soil until we dig them in spring. The fig tree at the Detroit Zoo Adopt-a-Garden is one for digging up and burying in the pit, since we have no root cellar space for a six foot tree!

...it's large enough to have been hiding a weed under its skirt. The plantain now visible (right of Janet's weeder handle) would steal water and nutrients and, growing snug up against the hosta's crown as it is, would be very tough to pry loose next spring.



Left, and below: Come on canna, time for bed!





## The 45mph garden

You can put a gardener behind the wheel but you can't take the flowers out of his eyes. Look at what's catching driver's eyes and raising questions this week.

Wondering if you can name this pine, fir or spruce tree I noticed in the U.P. of Michigan and also along I-75 heading south to the Detroit metro area. It is an impressive pine because the needles are very fine and billowy in a striking golden color. No other pine I ever noticed turned this impressive color.

I enjoy writing as a pastime so I would like to mention this pine in my writing but need to identify it by its common name so a reader could understand it. - D.M. -

That's probably not a pine, spruce or fir but a tamarack, also called **American larch**. Its scientific name is *Larix laricina*. The tamarack is a conifer, but not an evergreen. It takes on that beautiful yellow color in fall and then loses its needles over winter.



We also see it from when we travel up the Michigan mitten into Ontario north of Lake Superior. Its native range includes all of lower Michigan, east and north to Maine, west and north to northern Minnesota. From Minnesota the tamarack boundary line cuts into southeastern Manitoba and on across the northern Canadian plains, catching a bit of northeastern British Columbia and the Yukon before curving back to the Atlantic right along and into zone 1 -- the Arctic Circle.

Tamaracks, also known as American larch, do catch the eye in fall... and again in winter when people say, "What happened to the evergreen trees? We are seeing a whole bunch of dead spruces or pines along the road!" This 50- to 80' pyramidal native conifer is a good choice for moist, even wet soils, but cannot handle climates with hot summers or winters warmer than cold zone 5. It's also pretty sensitive in the root zone, not able to stand up well to the disturbances that go with gardening. So plant the tree - or its weeping dwarf form -- in a landscape that will be naturalized, with groundcovers under its limbs that can be left to fill and flow, fall down at year end and grow back up through their own duff.



**Green thumbs up** to gardeners who **leave at least a bit of garden standing and wild** over winter -- a haven for butterfly chrysalises and other "good guy" insects.

**Green thumbs down** to **steep sided berms**, especially those that come to a peak rather than to a flattened top. Plants struggle and die there because water runs off, not into the soil. If you're planning a berm, make it at least three times as wide as it is tall, and flatten the top where you plant.



Above: Perennial stems left standing can be attractive in winter. They also harbor insects and eggs, good and bad. Good bugs are slower to come back from eviction than the bad, so even if a few pests survive because we left an area un-cut in fall, it's worth it to have the beneficials right there ready to go in spring.

Left: Where do people think water will go, when they make steep sided berms like this? Certainly not to the plants' roots!



### Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

**A professional gardener and educator** since 1984, Janet Macunovich has been operating for twice that many years as "**Practical Patty**," a title bestowed by her Aunt Melrose. She's helped a great many people improve their gardens and their lives by sharing her experience and knowledge in understandable terms and practical tactics. When not writing this newsletter she's designing, planting and tending gardens through her business, Perennial Favorites.

**The guy with the dirty camera.** Professional gardener and horticultural photographer Steven Nikkila is often on both ends of a "shoot" -- doing the

garden work as well as capturing it for the enlightenment and enjoyment of others. He says a camera's worst enemies are water, sand and the camera owner. Like almost everything he includes in his photos, publications and gardens, that is based on personal experience. When you see his shots of gardens and gardeners at work, and hear his explanations how-to, keep in mind that he was peeling off gloves -- or muddying the camera! -- between every shot. Nikkila feels that, "doing the work myself that I describe in my articles and photos makes me better at teaching, writing and photography. Yet even after 20 years of doing this, I'm still lousy when it comes to keeping cameras clean!"

Email questions to Janet or Steven at [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) or call 248-681-7850.



## Where to catch Janet and Steven in-person:

**Chances to *Garden by Janet and Steven*** -- observe or try your hand to learn about fall garden clean up at any of the places below. These sessions are free but require registration. See page 19 for more about the why and how of such sessions.

**Wednesday, October 19, 10:30 a.m. - noon, *Garden by Janet & Steven* in Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan**, to learn about *gradual fall garden clean up*, from cutting back and weeding to edging and mulching. Come to observe or to pitch in with any work and learn by hands-on. This is a free, limited-size workshop. Call or email Janet & Steven to register, and to learn the address. Provide a telephone number in your email or when you call. Include the meeting date in your subject line of your email, please. JMaxGarden@aol.com, 248-681-7850.

**Monday, October 24, 10:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m., *Garden by Janet & Steven* in West Bloomfield, Michigan**, to learn about *pruning and fall garden clean up*. Come to observe or to pitch in with any work and learn by hands-on. This is a free, limited-size workshop. Call or email Janet & Steven to register, and to learn the address. Provide a telephone number in your email or when you call. Include the meeting date in your subject line of your email, please.

JMaxGarden@aol.com, 248-681-7850.



**Saturday, November 5, 9 a.m. - noon, *Garden by Janet & Steven* at the Detroit Zoo, Huntington Woods, MI, Woodward Avenue at I-696.** Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for Janet's & Steven's hands-on instruction in *bulb planting and fall garden clean up*. For instructions how to join us, call or email Janet & Steven. Provide a telephone number in your email or when you call. Include the word "zoo" in the subject line of your email, please. JMaxGarden@aol.com, 248-681-7850.



**Tuesday, October 18, 7 p.m., *Four Season Landscape***

***Begin in Fall!***, a how-to design presentation by Janet at the Washtenaw County Michigan State University Extension Master Gardeners' meeting in **Ann Arbor, Michigan**. In the MSU Extension classroom in the basement of the Washtenaw County Water Resource Commission building at 705 N. Zeeb Road -- just northwest of the I-94 Zeeb Road exit #169. Guests are welcome; a \$5 fee is payable at the door.



## The Garden by Janet & Steven series:

You and we are let-me-see, hands-on people. That's how we learn best. So from time to time we schedule *Garden by Janet & Steven* sessions and list them in this newsletter to afford you that kind of chance to grow. You visit us in a garden to either watch or work with us. Generally, there is no charge and we're in one of two kinds of locations:

1) At the **gardens we tend through our business, Perennial Favorites**: Our clients understand our enthusiasm for teaching. Some open their gardens to small groups who want to see and practice "how to." When work we're scheduled to do may be of interest to you, we invite you in.

2) In the **Detroit Zoo, Adopt-A-Garden** program where we're 22-year veterans. Many people have worked with us there, some for a day and others for years. We have fun, we learn, we accomplish much. You can come help us for a day, and stay on if you like, too.

Right: What *are* those people doing out there in the rain, staring at that tree? It's a Garden by Janet & Steven session taking place in a front yard on a rainy evening. (Give up a chance to garden because of a light rain? No way!) This dedicated crew watched, learned and pitched in to work out a way to save a tree from its own girdling root.



## Invite Janet or Steven or their expert friends to your club or community.

We go where we're invited! That's taken us all over the country and then some over the past 20 years. We address many topics, drawing from our list of **100+ talks**. We also continue **to meet groups' needs** and expand our horizons with new material and "hybrids" from our basic 100.

So, we're game for...

- a **how-to lesson for a garden club**,
- a **hands-on workshop** or
- a **multi-part class** for a small group!

We can also connect you to one or a whole line-up of other experts\* who know how to explain how-to. So give us a **call or send an email** to make a date, request our list of classes and talks or get a referral. **JMaxGarden@aol.com** or **248-681-7850**. Our calendars fill about a year in advance for spring weekends, and six months ahead for most other times.



\*Steven Nikkila and Janet Macunovich have been digging, shooting and teaching how-to for 22 years. They began producing conferences in the '90s and ran a gardening school for 12 years, featuring expert instructors who knew their stuff in a garden as well as knowing how to get their messages across in front of a group.

## You're true blue... and so is our coneflower!

The yellow coneflower we used as a donation telltale is all-blue. Thank you! We've paid the design and programming bills and are now learning to operate all the component parts of the site. We're itching to launch but determined to have everything usable *and* useful first. We'll keep you advised of progress right here.



## Donations always welcome

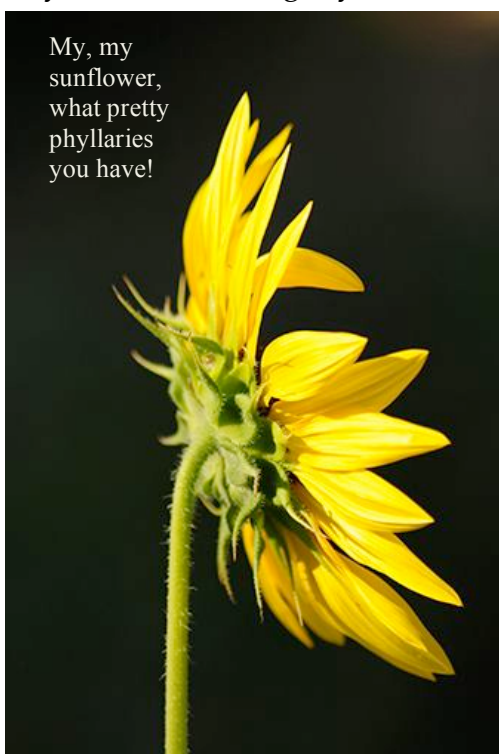
You helped us pay for the expert help we needed to insure that our website will be clean, easy to use and secure. Now the project's back to us, and we do a bit more as we can -- a process that's slowed a bit for the past few weeks, and a few weeks still to come as we close client's gardens. We hope to meet you there in November.

We're keeping our site ad-free, so we will always accept donations. **Send donations,** check payable to Janet Macunovich, to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328.

## Time to garden your walls...

Steven's decorated many walls with great garden and Nature images. He can help you do the same with photos that capture the garden beauty you love, framed or on canvas to your specifications.

You can purchase hard copies or high-resolution versions of any of Steven's images you see in *What's Coming Up*.\* Or



name a flower, type of scene or hue in mind you can request that dream. His library includes tens of thousands of plants and natural images.

Prices for **Steven's garden art** vary with your wishes in format and size. Examples:

- **Matted, framed,** overall 11 x 15", \$48
- No-fade **cloth tapestry,** 36 x 48', \$215

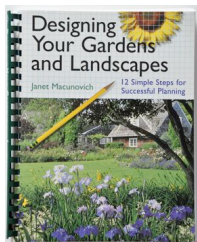
Describe your dream image, theme or color scheme to Steven at JMaxGarden@aol.com. He'll send you a photo sampler and price list.



\*Images in our newsletter are depicted in low- resolution to facilitate e-mail transmission. Steven's originals and art created from them are full resolution, with so much clear detail they are sharp even as wall-size cloth banners.



## You asked for our advice "on paper". We wrote and sell these books plus CDs:



### ***Designing Your Gardens and Landscape***

First published in 1990 as *Easy Garden Design*, a 150-page step-by-step recipe that's become a design classic. Janet developed, uses and has trained thousands of others to use this process. People say: "This is exactly the simple, clear approach I need!" This design process is applicable world-wide.

Soft cover, spiral bound. B&W illustrations by Janet. \$19.00

### ***Caring for Perennials***

Janet's unique approach to perennial care how-to, the real-time story of one bed from early spring to season's end. The 180 engaging and fact-filled pages make you part of all Janet does and you might ever need to do in each task's appropriate season and sequence. Includes a chart of what to do, when for 70 top perennials. Advice in this book is applicable in all of temperate U.S. and Canada. The perennial chart includes a key to adapt its timing for far southern or northern edges of that range.

Soft cover book. Text by Janet Macunovich. Color illustrations by Steven Nikkila. \$20.00



### ***Asking About Asters CD.***

A digital library of six years of Janet's work: weekly columns, newsletters and over 200 extra Q&A letters to individual gardeners. 1,681 questions answered about soil preparation, fertilizing, pruning, design, choosing plants, foiling bugs and much more. No repeated topics. Fully indexed; the entire collection can be searched from one index.

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### ***Potting Up Perennials CD. New for 2011***

Practical, beautiful answers about perennials and all kinds of flowers, trees, shrubs, design, pruning and much more is in this collection of 2009 & 2011's *What's Coming Up*. Includes 101 issues with over 1,700 pages, 1,600 articles and 2,400 images. Has a comprehensive index with how-to guide so you can search for any topic or detail in any of the 101 issues. Bonus on this CD: Steven Nikkila's Daydream Screen Saver, 74 of his most vivid works from gardens and nature.

1 CD in jewel case, Windows- and Mac compatible. \$20.00

### ***Janet & Steven's complete digital library New for 2011***

Set of two CDs: *Asking About Asters* and *Potting Up Perennials*. \$30.00



### ***Janet and Steven give you: Trees\****

A choice collection of Janet and Steven's advice for tree selection, planting and care. Each article made its debut in *Michigan Gardener* magazine and has been on hold since, awaiting completion of its fellows until this comprehensive compilation became possible. Topics include: Selecting trees; fall color; what's happening to ash trees; replacing a big tree; descriptions, lists and photos of great trees; why starting small is a good idea when planting; planting how-to, why's and why not's; staking, watering and fertilizing; mulching; rescuing a tree from the lawn; preventing construction damage; pruning to keep trees and shrubs small; removing suckers; detecting girdling roots; and dealing with maple tar spot and lecanium scale.

10" x 13" magazine, 48 pages. Color illustrations. \$12.00

### ***Janet and Steven give you: Landscape Ideas\****

Janet and Steven's favorite articles on landscape design and renovation: Designing with foliage color; covering up after the bulb season; doubling up perennials for 3-season color; shady solutions; using usual plants in unusual ways; designing hypo-allergenic gardens; Murphy's Laws applied to gardens; renovation how-to; fragrant plants and designs; attracting wildlife; rockwork; invasive plants; discovering a site's hidden assets; using herbs in a landscape; and how to cheat to improve a garden quickly. These articles appeared first in *Michigan Gardener* magazine individually between 1999 and 2011. Now they're collected in this set for your design library.

10" x 13" magazine, 48 pp. Color Ill.'s. \$12.00



### ***Janet and Steven give you: Garden Care\****

Vital how-to for tending a garden, from Janet and Steven's favorite articles on: bed preparation; soil testing; making a weed-free bed; spring start-up; improving hard-packed soil; fertilizing; watering; cutting back and deadheading; repairing irrigation; drought-tolerant plants; sharpening tools; tweaking in summer; staking; and the art of fall garden clean up. Items in this collection were selected from among Janet and Steven's ten years of *Michigan Gardener* articles. Each made its debut in that magazine, waited for its companion pieces and now they all join your library in this more durable and comprehensive form.

10" x 13" magazine, 48 pages. Color illustrations. \$12.00

### ***Janet and Steven give you: Trees, Landscape Ideas and Garden Care \****

Set of three 10" x 13" magazines, 48 pages each. \$30.00



**\*For a look inside, email [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) with the subject line "Magazine peek."**

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